

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Education Committee
March 9, 2009

**TESTIMONY OF
JOHN H. VOSS, MEMBER, STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION,
MARK K. MCQUILLAN, COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION, and
GEORGE COLEMAN, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION**

ON

RAISED BILL 944

**AN ACT CONCERNING A PLAN FOR ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL
SUCCESS FOR EVERY MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT**

The Department of Education strongly supports Raised Bill 944 which seeks to implement, on a voluntary basis, the Secondary School Reform plan adopted by the State Board of Education and developed by the Ad Hoc Committee for Secondary School Reform. We believe that adoption of this bill will be a crucial step forward in making progress on the important issue of improving Connecticut's middle schools and high schools. Efforts to reform our secondary schools have been attempted in the past, but no reform proposal has been as clearly and carefully defined as "The Connecticut Plan." Connecticut cannot allow this important piece of work to be sidelined. State legislatures in New Jersey, Virginia, and North Dakota all adopted plans for secondary school improvement just in the last month alone. If Connecticut wants to continue to be a leader in education and expects to build the educated workforce its economy desperately needs, adoption of this bill is critical.

The Ad Hoc Committee, made up of a broad range of stakeholders, developed "The Connecticut Plan" over eighteen months, with wide public input and participation. This input helped define the four basic components that are incorporated into Raised Bill 944. First, current graduation credit requirements are revised to require that all students earn twenty-five credits to graduate, up from the current requirement of twenty. Within this credit-requirement, students will also be required to complete specific courses in three academic clusters: 1) science, technology, engineering and mathematics ("STEM"); 2) humanities; and 3) career and life skills courses. Within the STEM cluster, the math and science course credit requirements will be increased and all students will be required to take algebra I, geometry and biology. World languages are eligible courses to complete the credits in the career and life skills cluster. These required courses will be accompanied by state-developed model curricula and model final examinations. Model curricula are contemplated for middle school courses as well.

Second, beginning in 6th grade and continuing through high school, each Connecticut student will participate in the development of a student success plan. The plan will incorporate the student's interests and abilities in order to establish an individualized program of study. The purpose of the plan is to help every student stay interested in school and to set and achieve post-high school educational and career goals. Department of Education staff is looking to districts which are already doing this type of work in order to develop best practices for implementation.

Third, all students are required to complete a Capstone experience in their senior year. The culminating project allows students to focus on an area of interest and demonstrate skills and understandings mapped to their Student Success Plans. As part of the experience, students will demonstrate research skills and communicate findings in written and oral presentations reviewed by the public. Department of Education staff has convened an advisory committee to help us develop guidelines for the Capstone project. Over twenty school districts have volunteered to be involved in this effort.

Last, districts will be called on to improve student supports systems and the school environment. The purpose of this component of the plan is to help struggling students stay interested and involved in school as well as to provide remedial programs. Programs that could be implemented to help districts achieve this goal include, but are not limited to, mentoring, peer and adult tutoring, after-school and weekend programs, school-based health programs, and differently paced courses. A task force is convening to work on this area as well.

While the implementation of this plan is optional under Raised Bill 944, the Department is currently considering incentives to encourage districts and students to adopt this secondary school reform plan sooner rather than later. We are planning to reconvene the Ad Hoc Committee in the next few weeks in order to address this issue. One incentive option we are considering is a certificate endorsement for all Connecticut high school students who have satisfactorily completed the requirements identified in Section 1 of this bill.

Raised Bill 944 is an important step to encourage districts to make progress in improving our secondary schools and to prepare Connecticut students to be "college ready" and "work force ready." As such, the Department strongly supports passage of this bill.